

begun to appear to Ransom more susceptible of domestication, as if she had been a small forest-creature, a catamount or a ruffled doe, that had learned to stand still while you stroked it, or even to extend a paw. She ministered to health, and she was healthy herself; if his cousin could have been even of this type Basil would have felt himself more fortunate.

'Good-night, Doctor,' he replied. 'You haven't told me, after all, your opinion of the capacity of the ladies.'

'Capacity for what?' said Doctor Prance. 'They've got a capacity for making people waste time. All I know is that I don't want any one to tell *me* what a lady can do!' And she edged away from him softly, as if she had been traversing a hospital-ward, and presently he saw her reach the door, which, with the arrival of the later comers, had remained open. She stood there an instant, turning over the whole assembly a glance like the flash of a watchman's bull's-eye, and then quickly passed out. Ransom could see that she was impatient of the general question and bored with being reminded, even for the sake of her rights, that she was a woman—a detail that she was in the habit of forgetting, having as many rights as she had time for. It was certain that whatever might become of the movement at large, Doctor Prance's own little revolution was a success.

VII.

SHE had no sooner left him than Olive Chancellor came towards him with eyes that seemed to say, 'I don't care whether you are here now or not—I'm all right!' But what her lips said was much more gracious; she asked him if she mightn't have the pleasure of introducing him to Mrs. Farrinder. Ransom consented, with a little of his Southern flourish, and in a moment the lady got up to receive him from the midst of the circle that now surrounded her. It was an occasion for her to justify her reputation of an elegant manner, and it must be impartially related that she struck Ransom as having a dignity in conversation and a command of the noble style which could not have been surpassed by a daughter—one of the most accomplished, most far-descended daughters—of his own latitude. It was as if she had known that he was not eager for the changes she advocated, and wished to show him that, especially to a Southerner who had bitten the dust, her sex could be magnanimous. This knowledge of his secret heresy seemed to him to be also in the faces of the other ladies, whose circumspect glances, however (for he had not been introduced), treated it as a pity rather than as a shame. He was conscious of all these middle-aged feminine eyes, conscious of curls, rather limp, that depended from dusky bonnets, of heads poked forward, as if with a waiting, listening, familiar habit, of no one being very bright or gay—no one, at least, but that girl he had noticed before, who had a brilliant head, and who now hovered on the edge of the conclave. He met her eye again; she was watching him too. It had been in his thought that Mrs. Farrinder, to whom his cousin might have betrayed or misrepresented him, would perhaps defy him to combat, and he wondered whether he could

pull himself together (he was extremely embarrassed) sufficiently to do honour to such a challenge. If she would fling down the glove on the temperance question, it seemed to him that it would be in him to pick it up; for the idea of a meddling legislation on this subject filled him with rage; the taste of liquor being good to him, and his conviction strong that civilisation itself would be in danger if it should fall into the power of a herd of vociferating women (I am but the reporter of his angry *formula*) to prevent a gentleman from taking his glass. Mrs. Farrinder proved to him that she had not the eagerness of insecurity; she asked him if he wouldn't like to give the company some account of the social and political condition of the South. He begged to be excused, expressing at the same time a high sense of the honour done him by such a request, while he smiled to himself at the idea of his extemporising a lecture. He smiled even while he suspected the meaning of the look Miss Chancellor gave him: 'Well, you are not of much account after all!' To talk to those people about the South—if they could have guessed how little he cared to do it! He had a passionate tenderness for his own country, and a sense of intimate connection with it which would have made it as impossible for him to take a roomful of Northern fanatics into his confidence as to read aloud his mother's or his mistress's letters. To be quiet about the Southern land, not to touch her with vulgar hands, to leave her alone with her wounds and her memories, not prating in the market-place either of her troubles or her hopes, but waiting as a man should wait, for the slow process, the sensible beneficence, of time—this was the desire of Ransom's heart, and he was aware of how little it could minister to the entertainment of Miss Birdseye's guests.

'We know so little about the women of the South; they are very voiceless,' Mrs. Farrinder remarked. 'How much can we count upon them? in what numbers would they flock to our standard? I have been recommended not to lecture in the Southern cities.'

'Ah, madam, that was very cruel advice—for us!' Basil Ransom exclaimed, with gallantry.

'I had a magnificent audience last spring in St. Louis,' a fresh young voice announced, over the heads of the gathered group—a voice which, on Basil's turning, like every one else, for an explanation, appeared to have proceeded from the pretty girl with red hair. She had coloured a little with the effort of making this declaration, and she stood there smiling at her listeners.

Mrs. Farrinder bent a benignant brow upon her, in spite of her being, evidently, rather a surprise. 'Oh, indeed; and your subject, my dear young lady?'

'The past history, the present condition, and the future prospects of our sex.'

'Oh, well, St. Louis—that's scarcely the South,' said one of the ladies.

'I'm sure the young lady would have had equal success at Charleston or New Orleans,' Basil Ransom interposed.

'Well, I wanted to go farther,' the girl continued, 'but I had no friends. I have friends in St. Louis.'

'You oughtn't to want for them anywhere,' said Mrs. Farrinder, in a manner which, by this time, had quite explained her reputation. 'I am acquainted with the loyalty of St. Louis.'

'Well, after that, you must let me introduce Miss Tarrant; she's perfectly dying to know you, Mrs. Farrinder.' These words emanated from one of the gentlemen, the young man with white hair, who had been mentioned to Ransom by Doctor Prance as a celebrated magazinist. He, too, up to this moment, had hovered in the background, but he now gently clove the assembly (several of the ladies made way for him), leading in the daughter of the mesmerist.

She laughed and continued to blush—her blush was the faintest pink; she looked very young and slim and fair as Mrs. Farrinder made way for her on the sofa which Olive Chancellor had quitted. 'I *have* wanted to know you; I admire you so much; I hoped so you would speak to-night. It's too lovely to see you, Mrs. Farrinder.' So she expressed herself, while the company watched the encounter with a look of refreshed inanition. 'You don't know who I am, of course; I'm just a girl who wants to thank you

for all you have done for us. For you have spoken for us girls, just as much as—just as much as——’ She hesitated now, looking about with enthusiastic eyes at the rest of the group, and meeting once more the gaze of Basil Ransom.

‘Just as much as for the old women,’ said Mrs. Farrinder, genially. ‘You seem very well able to speak for yourself.’

‘She speaks so beautifully—if she would only make a little address,’ the young man who had introduced her remarked. ‘It’s a new style, quite original,’ he added. He stood there with folded arms, looking down at his work, the conjunction of the two ladies, with a smile; and Basil Ransom, remembering what Miss Prance had told him, and enlightened by his observation in New York of some of the sources from which newspapers are fed, was immediately touched by the conviction that he perceived in it the material of a paragraph.

‘My dear child, if you’ll take the floor, I’ll call the meeting to order,’ said Mrs. Farrinder.

The girl looked at her with extraordinary candour and confidence. ‘If I could only hear you first—just to give me an atmosphere.’

‘I’ve got no atmosphere; there’s very little of the Indian summer about *me!* I deal with facts—hard facts,’ Mrs. Farrinder replied. ‘Have you ever heard me? If so, you know how crisp I am.’

‘Heard you? I’ve lived on you! It’s so much to me to see you. Ask mother if it ain’t!’ She had expressed herself, from the first word she uttered, with a promptness and assurance which gave almost the impression of a lesson rehearsed in advance. And yet there was a strange spontaneity in her manner, and an air of artless enthusiasm, of personal purity. If she was theatrical, she was naturally theatrical. She looked up at Mrs. Farrinder with all her emotion in her smiling eyes. This lady had been the object of many ovations; it was familiar to her that the collective heart of her sex had gone forth to her; but, visibly, she was puzzled by this unforeseen embodiment of gratitude and fluency, and her eyes wandered over the girl

with a certain reserve, while, within the depth of her eminently public manner, she asked herself whether Miss Tarrant were a remarkable young woman or only a forward minx. She found a response which committed her to neither view; she only said, ‘We want the young—of course we want the young!’

‘Who is that charming creature?’ Basil Ransom heard his cousin ask, in a grave, lowered tone, of Matthias Pardon, the young man who had brought Miss Tarrant forward. He didn’t know whether Miss Chancellor knew him, or whether her curiosity had pushed her to boldness. Ransom was near the pair, and had the benefit of Mr. Pardon’s answer.

‘The daughter of Doctor Tarrant, the mesmeric healer—Miss Verena. She’s a high-class speaker.’

‘What do you mean?’ Olive asked. ‘Does she give public addresses?’

‘Oh yes, she has had quite a career in the West. I heard her last spring at Topeka. They call it inspirational. I don’t know what it is—only it’s exquisite; so fresh and poetical. She has to have her father to start her up. It seems to pass into her.’ And Mr. Pardon indulged in a gesture intended to signify the passage.

Olive Chancellor made no rejoinder save a low, impatient sigh; she transferred her attention to the girl, who now held Mrs. Farrinder’s hand in both her own, and was pleading with her just to prelude a little. ‘I want a starting-point—I want to know where I am,’ she said. ‘Just two or three of your grand old thoughts.’

Basil stepped nearer to his cousin; he remarked to her that Miss Verena was very pretty. She turned an instant, glanced at him, and then said, ‘Do you think so?’ An instant later she added, ‘How you must hate this place!’

‘Oh, not now, we are going to have some fun,’ Ransom replied good-humouredly, if a trifle coarsely; and the declaration had a point, for Miss Birdseye at this moment reappeared, followed by the mesmeric healer and his wife.

‘Ah, well, I see you are drawing her out,’ said Miss Birdseye to Mrs. Farrinder; and at the idea that this process had been necessary Basil Ransom broke into a

smothered hilarity, a spasm which indicated that, for him, the fun had already begun, and procured him another grave glance from Miss Chancellor. Miss Verena seemed to him as far 'out' as a young woman could be. 'Here's her father, Doctor Tarrant—he has a wonderful gift—and her mother—she was a daughter of Abraham Greenstreet.' Miss Birdseye presented her companion; she was sure Mrs. Farrinder would be interested; she wouldn't want to lose an opportunity, even if for herself the conditions were not favourable. And then Miss Birdseye addressed herself to the company more at large, widening the circle so as to take in the most scattered guests, and evidently feeling that after all it was a relief that one happened to have an obscurely inspired maiden on the premises when greater celebrities had betrayed the whimsicality of genius. It was a part of this whimsicality that Mrs. Farrinder—the reader may find it difficult to keep pace with her variations—appeared now to have decided to utter a few of her thoughts, so that her hostess could elicit a general response to the remark that it would be delightful to have both the old school and the new.

'Well, perhaps you'll be disappointed in Verena,' said Mrs. Tarrant, with an air of dolorous resignation to any event, and seating herself, with her gathered mantle, on the edge of a chair, as if she, at least, were ready, whoever else might keep on talking.

'It isn't *me*, mother,' Verena rejoined, with soft gravity, rather detached now from Mrs. Farrinder, and sitting with her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the ground. With deference to Mrs. Tarrant, a little more talk was necessary, for the young lady had as yet been insufficiently explained. Miss Birdseye felt this, but she was rather helpless about it, and delivered herself, with her universal familiarity, which embraced every one and everything, of a wandering, amiable tale, in which Abraham Greenstreet kept reappearing, in which Doctor Tarrant's miraculous cures were specified, with all the facts wanting, and in which Verena's successes in the West were related, not with emphasis or hyperbole, in which Miss Birdseye never indulged, but as accepted and recognised wonders, natural in an age of new revelations.

She had heard of these things in detail only ten minutes before, from the girl's parents, but her hospitable soul had needed but a moment to swallow and assimilate them. If her account of them was not very lucid, it should be said in excuse for her that it was impossible to have any idea of Verena Tarrant unless one had heard her, and therefore still more impossible to give an idea to others. Mrs. Farrinder was perceptibly irritated; she appeared to have made up her mind, after her first hesitation, that the Tarrant family were fantastical and compromising. She had bent an eye of coldness on Selah and his wife—she might have regarded them all as a company of mountebanks.

'Stand up and tell us what you have to say,' she remarked, with some sternness, to Verena, who only raised her eyes to her, silently now, with the same sweetness, and then rested them on her father. This gentleman seemed to respond to an irresistible appeal; he looked round at the company with all his teeth, and said that these flattering allusions were not so embarrassing as they might otherwise be, inasmuch as any success that he and his daughter might have had was so thoroughly impersonal: he insisted on that word. They had just heard her say, 'It is not *me*, mother,' and he and Mrs. Tarrant and the girl herself were all equally aware it was not she. It was some power outside—it seemed to flow through her; he couldn't pretend to say why his daughter should be called, more than any one else. But it seemed as if she *was* called. When he just calmed her down by laying his hand on her a few moments, it seemed to come. It so happened that in the West it had taken the form of a considerable eloquence. She had certainly spoken with great facility to cultivated and high-minded audiences. She had long followed with sympathy the movement for the liberation of her sex from every sort of bondage; it had been her principal interest even as a child (he might mention that at the age of nine she had christened her favourite doll Eliza P. Moseley, in memory of a great precursor whom they all revered), and now the inspiration, if he might call it so, seemed just to flow in that channel. The voice that spoke from her

lips seemed to want to take that form. It didn't seem as if it *could* take any other. She let it come out just as it would—she didn't pretend to have any control. They could judge for themselves whether the whole thing was not quite unique. That was why he was willing to talk about his own child that way, before a gathering of ladies and gentlemen; it was because they took no credit—they felt it was a power outside. If Verena felt she was going to be stimulated that evening, he was pretty sure they would be interested. Only he should have to request a few moments' silence, while she listened for the voice.

Several of the ladies declared that they should be delighted—they hoped that Miss Tarrant was in good trim; whereupon they were corrected by others, who reminded them that it wasn't *her*—she had nothing to do with it—so her trim didn't matter; and a gentleman added that he guessed there were many present who had conversed with Eliza P. Moseley. Meanwhile Verena, more and more withdrawn into herself, but perfectly undisturbed by the public discussion of her mystic faculty, turned yet again, very prettily, to Mrs. Farrinder, and asked her if she wouldn't strike out—just to give her courage. By this time Mrs. Farrinder was in a condition of overhanging gloom; she greeted the charming suppliant with the frown of Juno. She disapproved completely of Doctor Tarrant's little speech, and she had less and less disposition to be associated with a miracle-monger. Abraham Greenstreet was very well, but Abraham Greenstreet was in his grave; and Eliza P. Moseley, after all, had been very tepid. Basil Ransom wondered whether it were effrontery or innocence that enabled Miss Tarrant to meet with such complacency the aloofness of the elder lady. At this moment he heard Olive Chancellor, at his elbow, with the tremor of excitement in her tone, suddenly exclaim: 'Please begin, please begin! A voice, a human voice, is what we want.'

'I'll speak after you, and if you're a humbug, I'll expose you!' Mrs. Farrinder said. She was more majestic than facetious.

'I'm sure we are all solid, as Doctor Tarrant says. I suppose we want to be quiet,' Miss Birdseye remarked.

VIII.

VERENA TARRANT got up and went to her father in the middle of the room; Olive Chancellor crossed and resumed her place beside Mrs. Farrinder on the sofa the girl had quitted; and Miss Birdseye's visitors, for the rest, settled themselves attentively in chairs or leaned against the bare sides of the parlour. Verena took her father's hands, held them for a moment, while she stood before him, not looking at him, with her eyes towards the company; then, after an instant, her mother, rising, pushed forward, with an interesting sigh, the chair on which she had been sitting. Mrs. Tarrant was provided with another seat, and Verena, relinquishing her father's grasp, placed herself in the chair, which Tarrant put in position for her. She sat there with closed eyes, and her father now rested his long, lean hands upon her head. Basil Ransom watched these proceedings with much interest, for the girl amused and pleased him. She had far more colour than any one there, for whatever brightness was to be found in Miss Birdseye's rather faded and dingy human collection had gathered itself into this attractive but ambiguous young person. There was nothing ambiguous, by the way, about her confederate; Ransom simply loathed him, from the moment he opened his mouth; he was intensely familiar—that is, his type was; he was simply the detested carpet-bagger. He was false, cunning, vulgar, ignoble; the cheapest kind of human product. That he should be the father of a delicate, pretty girl, who was apparently clever too, whether she had a gift or no, this was an annoying, disconcerting fact. The white, puffy mother, with the high forehead, in the corner there, looked more like a lady; but if she were one, it was all the more shame to her to have mated with such a varlet, Ransom

said to himself, making use, as he did generally, of terms of opprobrium extracted from the older English literature. He had seen Tarrant, or his equivalent, often before; he had 'whipped' him, as he believed, controversially, again and again, at political meetings in blighted Southern towns, during the horrible period of reconstruction. If Mrs. Farrinder had looked at Verena Tarrant as if she were a mountebank, there was some excuse for it, inasmuch as the girl made much the same impression on Basil Ransom. He had never seen such an odd mixture of elements; she had the sweetest, most unworldly face, and yet, with it, an air of being on exhibition, of belonging to a troupe, of living in the gaslight, which pervaded even the details of her dress, fashioned evidently with an attempt at the histrionic. If she had produced a pair of castanets or a tambourine, he felt that such accessories would have been quite in keeping.

Little Doctor Prance, with her hard good sense, had noted that she was anæmic, and had intimated that she was a deceiver. The value of her performance was yet to be proved, but she was certainly very pale, white as women are who have that shade of red hair; they look as if their blood had gone into it. There was, however, something rich in the fairness of this young lady; she was strong and supple, there was colour in her lips and eyes, and her tresses, gathered into a complicated coil, seemed to glow with the brightness of her nature. She had curious, radiant, liquid eyes (their smile was a sort of reflection, like the glisten of a gem), and though she was not tall, she appeared to spring up, and carried her head as if it reached rather high. Ransom would have thought she looked like an Oriental, if it were not that Orientals are dark; and if she had only had a goat she would have resembled Esmeralda, though he had but a vague recollection of who Esmeralda had been. She wore a light-brown dress, of a shape that struck him as fantastic, a yellow petticoat, and a large crimson sash fastened at the side; while round her neck, and falling low upon her flat young chest, she had a double chain of amber beads. It must be added that, in spite of her melodramatic appearance, there was no symptom that her performance,

whatever it was, would be of a melodramatic character. She was very quiet now, at least (she had folded her big fan), and her father continued the mysterious process of calming her down. Ransom wondered whether he wouldn't put her to sleep; for some minutes her eyes had remained closed; he heard a lady near him, apparently familiar with phenomena of this class, remark that she was going off. As yet the exhibition was not exciting, though it was certainly pleasant to have such a pretty girl placed there before one, like a moving statue. Doctor Tarrant looked at no one as he stroked and soothed his daughter; his eyes wandered round the cornice of the room, and he grinned upward, as if at an imaginary gallery. 'Quietly—quietly,' murmured, from time to time. 'It will come, my good child, it will come. Just let it work—just let it gather. The spirit, you know; you've got to let the spirit come out when it will.' He threw up his arms at moments, to rid himself of the wings of his long waterproof, which fell forward over his hands. Basil Ransom noticed all these things, and noticed also, opposite, the waiting face of his cousin, fixed, from her sofa, upon the closed eyes of the young prophetess. He grew more impatient at last, not of the delay of the edifying voice (though some time had elapsed), but of Tarrant's grotesque manipulations, which he resented as much as if he himself had felt their touch, and which seemed a dishonour to the passive maiden. They made him nervous, they made him angry, and it was only afterwards that he asked himself wherein they concerned him, and whether even a carpet-bagger hadn't a right to do what he pleased with his daughter. It was a relief to him when Verena got up from her chair, with a movement which made Tarrant drop into the background as if his part were now over. She stood there with a quiet face, serious and sightless; then, after a short further delay, she began to speak.

She began incoherently, almost inaudibly, as if she were talking in a dream. Ransom could not understand her; he thought it very queer, and wondered what Doctor Prance would have said. 'She's just arranging her ideas, and trying to get in report; she'll come out all right.'

This remark he heard dropped in a low tone by the mesmeric healer; 'in report' was apparently Tarrant's version of *en rapport*. His prophecy was verified, and Verena did come out, after a little; she came out with a great deal of sweetness—with a very quaint and peculiar effect. She proceeded slowly, cautiously, as if she were listening for the prompter, catching, one by one, certain phrases that were whispered to her a great distance off, behind the scenes of the world. Then memory, or inspiration, returned to her, and presently she was in possession of her part. She played it with extraordinary simplicity and grace; at the end of ten minutes Ransom became aware that the whole audience—Mrs. Farrinder, Miss Chancellor, and the tough subject from Mississippi—were under the charm. I speak of ten minutes, but to tell the truth the young man lost all sense of time. He wondered afterwards how long she had spoken; then he counted that her strange, sweet, crude, absurd, enchanting improvisation must have lasted half an hour. It was not what she said; he didn't care for that, he scarcely understood it; he could only see that it was all about the gentleness and goodness of women, and how, during the long ages of history, they had been trampled under the iron heel of man. It was about their equality—perhaps even (he was not definitely conscious) about their superiority. It was about their day having come at last, about the universal sisterhood, about their duty to themselves and to each other. It was about such matters as these, and Basil Ransom was delighted to observe that such matters as these didn't spoil it. The effect was not in what she said, though she said some such pretty things, but in the picture and figure of the half-bedizened damsel (playing, now again, with her red fan), the visible freshness and purity of the little effort. When she had gained confidence she opened her eyes, and their shining softness was half the effect of her discourse. It was full of school-girl phrases, of patches of remembered eloquence, of childish lapses of logic, of flights of fancy which might indeed have had success at Topeka; but Ransom thought that if it had been much worse it would have been quite as good, for the argument, the doctrine,

had absolutely nothing to do with it. It was simply an intensely personal exhibition, and the person making it happened to be fascinating. She might have offended the taste of certain people—Ransom could imagine that there were other Boston circles in which she would be thought pert; but for himself all he could feel was that to *his* starved senses she irresistibly appealed. He was the stiffest of conservatives, and his mind was steeled against the inanities she uttered—the rights and wrongs of women, the equality of the sexes, the hysterics of conventions, the further stultification of the suffrage, the prospect of conscript mothers in the national Senate. It made no difference; she didn't mean it, she didn't know what she meant, she had been stuffed with this trash by her father, and she was neither more nor less willing to say it than to say anything else; for the necessity of her nature was not to make converts to a ridiculous cause, but to emit those charming notes of her voice, to stand in those free young attitudes, to shake her braided locks like a naiad rising from the waves, to please every one who came near her, and to be happy that she pleased. I know not whether Ransom was aware of the bearings of this interpretation, which attributed to Miss Tarrant a singular hollowness of character; he contented himself with believing that she was as innocent as she was lovely, and with regarding her as a vocalist of exquisite faculty, condemned to sing bad music. How prettily, indeed, she made some of it sound!

'Of course I only speak to women—to my own dear sisters; I don't speak to men, for I don't expect them to like what I say. They pretend to admire us very much, but I should like them to admire us a little less and to trust us a little more. I don't know what we have ever done to them that they should keep us out of everything. We have trusted *them* too much, and I think the time has come now for us to judge them, and say that by keeping us out we don't think they have done so well. When I look around me at the world, and at the state that men have brought it to, I confess I say to myself, "Well, if women had fixed it this way I should like to know what they would think of it!" When I see the dreadful misery of mankind

and think of the suffering of which at any hour, at any moment, the world is full, I say that if this is the best they can do by themselves, they had better let us come in a little and see what *we* can do. We couldn't possibly make it worse, could we? If we had done only this, we shouldn't boast of it. Poverty, and ignorance, and crime; disease, and wickedness, and wars! Wars, always more wars, and always more and more. Blood, blood—the world is drenched with blood! To kill each other, with all sorts of expensive and perfected instruments, that is the most brilliant thing they have been able to invent. It seems to me that we might stop it, we might invent something better. The cruelty—the cruelty; there is so much, so much! Why shouldn't tenderness come in? Why should our woman's hearts be so full of it, and all so wasted and withered, while armies and prisons and helpless miseries grow greater all the while? I am only a girl, a simple American girl, and of course I haven't seen much, and there is a great deal of life that I don't know anything about. But there are some things I feel—it seems to me as if I had been born to feel them; they are in my ears in the stillness of the night and before my face in the visions of the darkness. It is what the great sisterhood of women might do if they should all join hands, and lift up their voices above the brutal uproar of the world, in which it is so hard for the plea of mercy or of justice, the moan of weakness and suffering, to be heard. We should quench it, we should make it still, and the sound of our lips would become the voice of universal peace! For this we must trust one another, we must be true and gentle and kind. We must remember that the world is ours too, ours—little as we have ever had to say about anything!—and that the question is *not* yet definitely settled whether it shall be a place of injustice or a place of love!

It was with this that the young lady finished her harangue, which was not followed by her sinking exhausted into her chair or by any of the traces of a laboured climax. She only turned away slowly towards her mother, smiling over her shoulder at the whole room, as if it had been a single person, without a flush in her whiteness, or the need

of drawing a longer breath. The performance had evidently been very easy to her, and there might have been a kind of impertinence in her air of not having suffered from an exertion which had wrought so powerfully on every one else. Ransom broke into a genial laugh, which he instantly swallowed again, at the sweet grotesqueness of this virginal creature's standing up before a company of middle-aged people to talk to them about 'love,' the note on which she had closed her harangue. It was the most charming touch in the whole thing, and the most vivid proof of her innocence. She had had immense success, and Mrs. Tarrant, as she took her into her arms and kissed her, was certainly able to feel that the audience was not disappointed. They were exceedingly affected; they broke into exclamations and murmurs. Selah Tarrant went on conversing ostentatiously with his neighbours, slowly twirling his long thumbs and looking up at the cornice again, as if there could be nothing in the brilliant manner in which his daughter had acquitted herself to surprise *him*, who had heard her when she was still more remarkable, and who, moreover, remembered that the affair was so impersonal. Miss Birdseye looked round at the company with dim exultation; her large mild cheeks were shining with unwiped tears. Young Mr. Pardon remarked, in Ransom's hearing, that he knew parties who, if they had been present, would want to engage Miss Verena at a high figure for the winter campaign. And Ransom heard him add in a lower tone: 'There's money for some one in that girl; you see if she don't have quite a run!' As for our Mississippian he kept his agreeable sensation for himself, only wondering whether he might not ask Miss Birdseye to present him to the heroine of the evening. Not immediately, of course, for the young man mingled with his Southern pride a shyness which often served all the purpose of humility. He was aware how much he was an outsider in such a house as that, and he was ready to wait for his coveted satisfaction till the others, who all hung together, should have given her the assurance of an approval which she would value, naturally, more than anything he could say to her. This episode had imparted animation to the assembly; a certain

gaiety, even, expressed in a higher pitch of conversation, seemed to float in the heated air. People circulated more freely, and Verena Tarrant was presently hidden from Ransom's sight by the close-pressed ranks of the new friends she had made. 'Well, I never heard it put *that* way!' Ransom heard one of the ladies exclaim; to which another replied that she wondered one of their bright women hadn't thought of it before. 'Well, it *is* a gift, and no mistake,' and 'Well, they may call it what they please, it's a pleasure to listen to it'—these genial tributes fell from the lips of a pair of ruminating gentlemen. It was affirmed within Ransom's hearing that if they had a few more like that the matter would soon be fixed; and it was rejoined that they couldn't expect to have a great many—the style was so peculiar. It was generally admitted that the style was peculiar, but Miss Tarrant's peculiarity was the explanation of her success.

IX.

RANSOM approached Mrs. Farrinder again, who had remained on her sofa with Olive Chancellor; and as she turned her face to him he saw that she had felt the universal contagion. Her keen eye sparkled, there was a flush on her matronly cheek, and she had evidently made up her mind what line to take. Olive Chancellor sat motionless; her eyes were fixed on the floor with the rigid, alarmed expression of her moments of nervous diffidence; she gave no sign of observing her kinsman's approach. He said something to Mrs. Farrinder, something that imperfectly represented his admiration of Verena; and this lady replied with dignity that it was no wonder the girl spoke so well—she spoke in such a good cause. 'She is very graceful, has a fine command of language; her father says it's a natural gift.' Ransom saw that he should not in the least discover Mrs. Farrinder's real opinion, and her dissimulation added to his impression that she was a woman with a policy. It was none of his business whether in her heart she thought Verena a parrot or a genius; it was perceptible to him that she saw she would be effective, would help the cause. He stood almost appalled for a moment, as he said to himself that she would take her up and the girl would be ruined, would force her note and become a screamer. But he quickly dodged this vision, taking refuge in a mechanical appeal to his cousin, of whom he inquired how she liked Miss Verena. Olive made no answer; her head remained averted, she bored the carpet with her conscious eyes. Mrs. Farrinder glanced at her askance, and then said to Ransom serenely:

'You praise the grace of your Southern ladies, but you have had to come North to see a human gazelle. Miss

Tarrant is of the best New England stock—what *I* call the best!’

‘I’m sure from what I have seen of the Boston ladies, no manifestation of grace can excite my surprise,’ Ransom rejoined, looking, with his smile, at his cousin.

‘She has been powerfully affected,’ Mrs. Farrinder explained, very slightly dropping her voice, as Olive, apparently, still remained deaf.

Miss Birdseye drew near at this moment; she wanted to know if Mrs. Farrinder didn’t want to express some acknowledgment, on the part of the company at large, for the real stimulus Miss Tarrant had given them. Mrs. Farrinder said: Oh yes, she would speak now with pleasure; only she must have a glass of water first. Miss Birdseye replied that there was some coming in a moment; one of the ladies had asked for it, and Mr. Pardon had just stepped down to draw some. Basil took advantage of this intermission to ask Miss Birdseye if she would give him the great privilege of an introduction to Miss Verena. ‘Mrs. Farrinder will thank her for the company,’ he said, laughing, ‘but she won’t thank her for me.’

Miss Birdseye manifested the greatest disposition to oblige him; she was so glad he had been impressed. She was proceeding to lead him toward Miss Tarrant when Olive Chancellor rose abruptly from her chair and laid her hand, with an arresting movement, on the arm of her hostess. She explained to her that she must go, that she was not very well, that her carriage was there; also that she hoped Miss Birdseye, if it was not asking too much, would accompany her to the door.

‘Well, you are impressed too,’ said Miss Birdseye, looking at her philosophically. ‘It seems as if no one had escaped.’

Ransom was disappointed; he saw he was going to be taken away, and, before he could suppress it, an exclamation burst from his lips—the first exclamation he could think of that would perhaps check his cousin’s retreat: ‘Ah, Miss Olive, are you going to give up Mrs. Farrinder?’

At this Miss Olive looked at him, showed him an extraordinary face, a face he scarcely understood or even

recognised. It was portentously grave, the eyes were enlarged, there was a red spot in each of the cheeks, and as directed to him, a quick, piercing question, a kind of leaping challenge, in the whole expression. He could only answer this sudden gleam with a stare, and wonder afresh what trick his Northern kinswoman was destined to play him. Impressed too? He should think he had been! Mrs. Farrinder, who was decidedly a woman of the world, came to his assistance, or to Miss Chancellor’s, and said she hoped very much Olive wouldn’t stay—she felt these things too much. ‘If you stay, I won’t speak,’ she added; ‘I should upset you altogether.’ And then she continued, tenderly, for so preponderantly intellectual a nature: ‘When women feel as you do, how can I doubt that we shall come out all right?’

‘Oh, we shall come out all right, I guess,’ murmured Miss Birdseye.

‘But you must remember Beacon Street,’ Mrs. Farrinder subjoined. ‘You must take advantage of your position—you must wake up the Back Bay!’

‘I’m sick of the Back Bay!’ said Olive fiercely; and she passed to the door with Miss Birdseye, bidding good-bye to no one. She was so agitated that, evidently, she could not trust herself, and there was nothing for Ransom but to follow. At the door of the room, however, he was checked by a sudden pause on the part of the two ladies: Olive stopped and stood there hesitating. She looked round the room and spied out Verena, where she sat with her mother, the centre of a gratified group; then, throwing back her head with an air of decision, she crossed over to her. Ransom said to himself that now, perhaps, was his chance, and he quickly accompanied Miss Chancellor. The little knot of reformers watched her as she arrived; their faces expressed a suspicion of her social importance, mingled with conscientious scruples as to whether it were right to recognise it. Verena Tarrant saw that she was the object of this manifestation, and she got up to meet the lady whose approach was so full of point. Ransom perceived, however, or thought he perceived, that she recognised nothing; she had no suspicions of social import-

ance. Yet she smiled with all her radiance, as she looked from Miss Chancellor to him; smiled because she liked to smile, to please, to feel her success—or was it because she was a perfect little actress, and this was part of her training? She took the hand that Olive put out to her; the others, rather solemnly, sat looking up from their chairs.

'You don't know me, but I want to know you,' Olive said. 'I can thank you now. Will you come and see me?'

'Oh yes; where do you live?' Verena answered, in the tone of a girl for whom an invitation (she hadn't so many) was always an invitation.

Miss Chancellor syllabled her address, and Mrs. Tarrant came forward, smiling. 'I know about you, Miss Chancellor. I guess your father knew my father—Mr. Greenstreet. Verena will be very glad to visit you. We shall be very happy to see you in *our* home.'

Basil Ransom, while the mother spoke, wanted to say something to the daughter, who stood there so near him, but he could think of nothing that would do; certain words that came to him, his Mississippi phrases, seemed patronising and ponderous. Besides, he didn't wish to assent to what she had said; he wished simply to tell her she was delightful, and it was difficult to mark that difference. So he only smiled at her in silence, and she smiled back at him—a smile that seemed to him quite for himself.

'Where do you live?' Olive asked; and Mrs. Tarrant replied that they lived at Cambridge, and that the horse-cars passed just near their door. Whereupon Olive insisted 'Will you come very soon?' and Verena said, Oh yes, she would come very soon, and repeated the number in Charles Street, to show that she had taken heed of it. This was done with childlike good faith. Ransom saw that she would come and see any one who would ask her like that, and he regretted for a minute that he was not a Boston lady, so that he might extend to her such an invitation. Olive Chancellor held her hand a moment longer, looked at her in farewell, and then, saying, 'Come, Mr. Ransom,' drew him out of the room. In the hall they met Mr. Pardon, coming up from the lower regions with a jug of water and a tumbler. Miss Chancellor's hackney-coach

was there, and when Basil had put her into it she said to him that she wouldn't trouble him to drive with her—his hotel was not near Charles Street. He had so little desire to sit by her side—he wanted to smoke—that it was only after the vehicle had rolled off that he reflected upon her coolness, and asked himself why the deuce she had brought him away. She *was* a very odd cousin, was this Boston cousin of his. He stood there a moment, looking at the light in Miss Birdseye's windows and greatly minded to re-enter the house, now he might speak to the girl. But he contented himself with the memory of her smile, and turned away with a sense of relief, after all, at having got out of such wild company, as well as with (in a different order) a vulgar consciousness of being very thirsty.